

570

.3

27th

.15



Class D 572

Book .3

Copyright No. 7

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT, E 5





Home Again!



THE 27TH DIVISION

THE STORY OF
ITS SACRIFICES
AND
ACHIEVEMENTS

Published by
JOHN H. EGGERS CO. INC.
NEW YORK

5

Copyright, 1919
John H. Eggers
New York

©CLA51292

APR -3 1919

The 27th Division

★ The Story of Its Sacrifices ★ and Achievements

INTRODUCTORY—SUCCESS THROUGH SACRIFICE

Some day a complete history of the Twenty-Seventh Division will be written. It will necessarily run into volumes and volumes. On its purely human side the acts of valor performed by individual soldiers are so numerous that a record of them alone would fill thousands of pages. On its military side, the intricacies of modern warfare will necessitate lengthy accounts of the actions in which the Twenty-Seventh engaged from July 9th, 1918 up to the signing of the armistice.

After all, from the historical standpoint any one battle is only a dramatic episode. The newspapers have told us of the accomplishments of the Twenty-Seventh. Its success in penetrating the Hindenburg Line is now history. The newspapers have all touched on the enormous losses incurred in that battle.

This sketch, based on reports of Major General O'Ryan, now in the archives of the Division and not heretofore made public, is a summing up of the Twenty-Seventh's achievements, written with the special purpose of emphasizing the sacrificial nature of its participation in the war. It is a record of objectives maintained, of positions held, of bravery and of victory, but more than all it is a memorial to those who died—to those who knew so well how to die.

BEGINNING THE ATTACK

Rather than follow a chronological order, we will begin with the breaking of the Hindenburg Line, which is the outstanding feature in any story of the Twenty-Seventh. The battle of the breaking of the Hindenburg Line typifies sacrifice. It

typifies success won through sacrifice. All observers are agreed that in the breaking of the Hindenburg Line the Twenty-Seventh had to go through a veritable Inferno. The experiences of the six hundred in the famous Charge of the Light Brigade, made immortal by Tennyson, pale into insignificance when compared with the advance of the Twenty-Seventh across "No Man's Land" into a maelstrom of steel and fire and hate.

It began very early on that fateful morning—the 27th of September. The day is breaking but it is quite dark. The sun is still below the horizon. Stretched out along a white tape line for a distance of about 4000 yards, some eighteen hundred men of the Twenty-Seventh Division are standing waiting for the moment to advance. Though it is September, the morning is cold. The clouds hang low and the mist is heavy. It is unusually quiet, the silence being only broken by the occasional intermittent distant fire which characterizes battle fronts during periods of so-called inactivity. It is a solemn moment. Every one knows that serious business is ahead. The men themselves are generally silent. It is a period of waiting and each man knows that it is only a matter of moments when the forward movement will begin.

Suddenly all is changed. The moment for the advance arrives. The barrage starts promptly at the zero hour. Just as dawn is breaking, the gun on the extreme right fires as a signal: a mighty roar follows as the other guns open up all along the line and various colored lights and rockets are seen going up from the Boches' line—his S. O. S. signals calling for a counter-barrage to protect him from the advancing Americans. Our aeroplanes now appear overhead. The eighteen hundred grim, determined, upstanding men on the front line simultaneously begin a forward movement, each man with bayonet fixed and about six feet from his neighbor and turning neither to the right nor to the left.

The noise from the light and heavy guns of the British, who are supporting our men is terrific. It is still dark enough to make the flashes from exploding shells visible. The men are immediately conscious that the Boche has only had one eye

shut during the night. Now comes the most ominous thing of all. The sickening, whirring whine of machine-gun bullets is added to the din. There is no sound in the world like it: with it comes death and wounds on every side.

It would seem that the enemy in this particular engagement knew almost as if by instinct when the attack would begin, for in a great many instances men and officers were killed apparently before they had had time to take a step. Day was breaking and those in the rear of the advancing column had evidences of the deadliness of the conflict. Wounded came streaming down the roads from all organizations in the line. A little later in the morning some of the roads were choked with litter cases, with walking wounded and litter bearers and stragglers.

"KILL, OR BE KILLED"

The reader must keep in mind that particularly in the last phases of the war, an attack like that in which the Twenty-Seventh took part depended for success always on the actions of the survivors. For weeks these men of the Twenty-Seventh who went over the top, as we are describing, had been taught that a position once captured must never be lost. They had been trained into the theory that killing and being killed was part of the game; that the bayonetting of a Boche had no relation to the saving of a man's own life for his own sake, but only for the sake of the objective. The attack was undertaken with a fixed determination to carry it through to success. One can never lose sight of the fact that after the beginning of an attack there is only one thing to do, and that is to go forward.

A brief outline showing the position of the Twenty-Seventh Division and the objects of its initial attack on September 27th will help to give an idea of the ultimate aim. On September 25th, two days before the attack, the Division took over the sector lying directly opposite that portion of the Hindenburg Line which began at Vendhuille and extended to a point a little north of Bellicourt. Just beyond the Hindenburg Line on this sector and running nearly parallel to it is the St. Quentin canal tunnel, which is 6000 yards long, built by Napoleon in 1811,

which will be described more fully in a subsequent paragraph. Lying between the Hindenburg Line and trenches occupied by the Twenty-Seventh Division, the Germans held several outpost positions which were strongly fortified.

The situation is aptly described by the following quotation from official reports concerning the Twenty-Seventh, after taking over the sector in question:

"Since we again approach the Hindenburg Line activity and work on (enemy) trenches is visible, especially at Bony and Bellicourt. In general the Hindenburg Line was ready before, and remained in good condition; the wire is excellent. Little or no work has been recently done on back lines behind the Hindenburg Line. For example the Catelet-Nauroy-Magny Line is a single trench with dugouts, not very heavily wired.

THREE STRONG OUTPOSTS

"On the other hand the enemy evidently did not wish us to approach too near to the Hindenburg Line, and he did a good deal of work on various outpost lines, for example Guillemont and the Quennemont Farms. In particular the Fresnoy-Fayette Ridge was strongly organized with new trenches and considerable belts of wire."

These facts had been learned by airplane observers and patrols. The report then goes on to say:

"An attack on the main Hindenburg Line being contemplated, it was decided by the army that a preliminary operation was necessary in order to occupy the outer line of defenses including the three strong points of the Knoll, Guillemont and Quennemont Farms from which to launch the main attack.

"The line taken over by the Thirtieth Division on our right was further advanced than ours and included much of the outer line of defenses; the line held by the British Twelfth Division on our left dropped back in a northwesterly direction, giving the Twenty-Seventh Division little support and leaving Vendhuille (strongly occupied) free to threaten the left of any advance made by this Division."

Accordingly, Field Order Number 47, Twenty-Seventh Division, was issued designating the following troops for at-

tack: Fifty-third Infantry Brigade, One Hundred Fourth Machine Gun Battalion, One Hundred Sixth Machine Gun Battalion, twelve tanks of the Fourth Tank Brigade, nine brigades of Field Artillery British, Detachment of One Hundred Second Engineers, Detachment of One Hundred Second Field Battalion. These to be assisted by Heavy Artillery.

The instructions also showed that the attack was to be carried out by the One Hundred Sixth Infantry, three Battalions, side by side, disposed in depth; that our troops had as their objective the occupations of the rearmost trenches of the outer line of the Hindenburg system, which was a distance of about 1100 yards from the lines occupied by our troops.

“THE MEN MUST GO FORWARD”

A very clear idea of what was expected as the result of this attack can be gotten by reading the instructions which were made to the One Hundred Sixth Infantry. It should be noted that the keynote of these instructions was: “The men must go forward.” The order follows:

“The One Hundred Sixth Infantry will attack in the sector indicated as the front of the Twenty-Seventh Division; that is to say, from the black line on the map which indicates approximately the present front line of the British in that sector. The attack of the One Hundred Sixth Infantry will be supported by tanks and a rolling barrage. The men will be informed that they are not to depend upon the tanks. The tanks will be present simply to give such assistance as they can. No matter what happens to the tanks, *the men must go forward*. The tanks will return immediately the objective is gained. It is most essential that this be impressed upon the men.

“The front of the attack is roughly 4000 yards. The objective is shown by the dotted red line on the accompanying map. The ground to be taken therefore varies in depth from 500 yards to 1500 yards. At the outset it is essential that officers and *non-commissioned officers* study the maps furnished them with particular reference to the contours. During this it will be noted that the country to be operated over is hilly and that these hills, as well as the roads and villages, form prominent

landmarks which will serve as ready references, thus making it simple for all to locate themselves, move in the right direction and correctly report their positions.

"All should particularly note the three ridges, all running northeasterly to the objective line, one being on the north end of our line, one in the center and one near the south end of our line. These three ridges with the valleys between them, form excellent landmarks.

"In this operation the regiment will attack with all three battalions in line disposed in depth, and upon reaching its objective will consolidate in that manner. The leading elements *will follow the barrage as closely as possible*. It is essential to explain to the men the importance of this. This explanation will be made by captains and by platoon commanders as well.

"As the barrage clears enemy points of resistance during the advance, the leading elements will go through them *without hesitation*, for they must not lose ground behind the barrage. Assure the men that enemy soldiers in such places will surrender, but that whether they do or not the leading elements must go on, leaving to the mopping up parties in the rear the task of dealing with them. Mopping up parties will see that prisoners are disarmed and sent to the rear. Nominal guards only will be necessary. Prisoners will be taken over by the Military Police.

"No matter what the success, or no matter what inducements are offered, this attack of the One Hundred Sixth Infantry will not proceed beyond the objective indicated. The objective line will be consolidated with all speed and greatest thoroughness. Impress this on the men, for the enemy will undoubtedly counter-attack. Having taken the objective, or secured the greatest advance practicable, every attention will be given to the preparation of the position to repulse counter-attack.

"THE LINE MUST BE HELD"

"Careful supervision will be given by officers of the regiment to the placing of machine guns and Lewis guns when the line is consolidated so that the best fields of fire may be obtained.

All ranks should be informed *that heavy shelling and counter-attacks will not be considered as reasons for withdrawal.* The line must be held irrespective of casualties or weather conditions. The job is a matter of fast and deep digging and the maintenance of good fields of fire.

"Our men should be informed that British contact planes will fly over them sounding the letter 'A' of the Morse alphabet on the Klaxon horn. The letter 'A' is indicated by a short and long blast of the Klaxon. This signal is the demand for the men *of the front line* to show its flares and flash its tin discs so that the aviator may locate and report the location of the front line. Men in the support lines should not give these signals as such action would only serve to mislead the aviator.

"Officers of the regiment will see to it that all ranks of the regiment are provided with pieces of tin to be issued and sewed on the inside of the respirator flap for use in signalling to the contact aeroplanes as prescribed. The men will be cautioned not to fire on aeroplanes showing the British insignia. We are assured that no authentic case is recorded where an enemy aeroplane has carried Allied insignia.

"All officers are charged with the duty of insuring the possession and readiness for use in each company of rifle grenades, rockets and flares, and message rockets for the purpose of sending back messages.

"The men will be warned to keep themselves fit by getting all the sleep they can before the commencement of the attack. Company and platoon commanders, if necessary, should literally put their men to bed as nothing makes greater drain upon physical fitness than lack of sleep. The greatest attention should be given the matter of food and every attention given to getting up hot food to the men in the front."

When it is recalled that in this preliminary engagement practically no prisoners were taken on either side, that the supreme rule was kill or be killed, it is interesting to note that before going into action the men of the Hundred and Sixth were given this warning, "No man must be taken as a prisoner but must fight to a finish."

Though the Commander of the Division felt confident that

the "No prisoner rule" would prevail, he foresaw a possible capture of an occasional man in some unforeseen circumstance and gave the following instructions: "If by any chance a man should be taken prisoner, he will give only such information as will lead the enemy to believe that the rest of the Division to which he was attached was going South."

WHAT A PRISONER MIGHT TELL

Every man had rehearsed before going into action the statement that he expected to make in the rare instance of his being made a prisoner. "I left my billet in a rear area two or three days before" was all the prisoner expected to say, except that he had heard that the rest of the Division was going South. How far South he did not know, but believed the move was made by rail. Since that time he had seen no other unit of his Division in this area, but British troops only.

Shortly after the advance began, the rain, the everlasting rain that characterized the fighting in Northern France, added to the hazard of battle. At six forty-five, a little more than an hour after the men left the "jumping-off line" at dawn, a telegram was received at Division Headquarters from the Fifty-Third Infantry Brigade reporting that a success signal had been sent up by the left battalion. But in the next four hours the Boche machine gunners before being killed took a terrible toll of our dead and wounded. At ten forty many companies were entirely without officers.

At noon the three big outposts of the enemy, the Knoll, Guillemont Farm, and Quennemont Farm still remained to be taken.

One of the disappointments was the failure of the tanks.

Four tanks were assigned to reach each battalion subsector, these to advance with the first line and one to follow in support loaded with wire and tools for consolidating the new position. The tanks with the right battalion failed to get into action. A few tanks in each of the other sectors accompanied the troops to the objective, moved around Guillemont Farm and the Knoll and then returned. Only one supply tank succeeded in

getting forward and dumped its load. On the whole the tanks were not of much assistance.

Officers' diaries indicate in short forceful sentences the terrific character of the fighting and the stubborn resistance of the enemy. First line companies got well into the trenches in places but in others reached only the barbed wire area. While we gained a foothold in the three strong outposts we were not sufficiently strong to drive out their defenders. The Boche machine gunners in the rear gradually forced our line to withdraw but not until after an all day fight in which the loss of officers with our companies made itself felt in depriving the units of leaders.

OUR LOSSES ENORMOUS

An extent of the losses in this engagement can be gleaned from the following quotation from the official report:

"On the night previous to the operation the First Battalion of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry reported six officers and four hundred and ninety-one men present for all duty. On the morning of the twenty-ninth it reported four officers and one hundred and ninety-eight men."

The Second Battalion of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry reached its objective and the tanks circled Guillemont Farm but, as was discovered in later operations, this position was strongly held by the enemy with many dugouts and underground passages. Boche machine guns kept appearing from new points. Reports received about noon indicated that the enemy still occupied the Farm.

The fighting around the Knoll—a vital strategic point—was perhaps the most sanguinary in this initial advance. At ten forty in the morning the Commanding General of the Fifty-Third Brigade sent a message to Division Headquarters reporting the situation. At eleven thirty the Commanding Officer of the Third Battalion of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry left Battalion Headquarters to reorganize the front line. Shortly after noon this part of the line in a counter-attack was driven off the Knoll, but with the aid of artillery and machine guns our men drove the Boche back to Tombois trench in less than half an hour. This counter-attack by our

troops in the attacking line was assisted by the arrival of Company L, One Hundred and Fifth Infantry, one platoon of which had been sent forward about 11 A. M. as a reinforcement followed by the remainder of the company and by Company I. At 4 P. M. Company G, One Hundred and Fifth Infantry, was placed in support about 400 yards in the rear. Before dark the Third Battalion, One Hundred and Fifth Infantry, took up position in the original front line trenches which formed the "jumping-off line" of the morning, as they were out of touch with the Third Battalion, One Hundred and Sixth Infantry, at their right.

The Third Battalion, One Hundred and Sixth Infantry reported, previous to the operation, present for all duty (including rear echelon) 12 officers and 484 men, and on the morning of September 29th, 4 officers and 210 men present for all duty. Reports to the location of front line were conflicting during the latter part of the afternoon, but later airplane reports indicated that the Knoll was still in possession of the enemy.

Subsequent inspection of the ground fought over disclosed an immense number of enemy dead.

On the night of the 27th of September, the remnant of the One Hundred and Sixth, which had borne the brunt of this terrible day's fighting, were relieved by the One Hundred and Seventh and One Hundred and Eighth Infantry, which took possession of the line that only one day before had constituted the outpost position of the enemy. The men of the One Hundred and Sixth, tired, spattered with mud, stiff and lame, scratched by barbed wire, oftentimes half dazed with shell shock, retired to the rear to get a well-deserved rest.

On the next day (September 28th), General Haig visited Division Headquarters.

General O'Ryan's report regarding the activities of the relief units on this day contained the following information:

"Officers report stiff fighting in numerous places. The enemy seems to have reorganized points along front. The Fifty-fourth Infantry Brigade Regiments were patrolling the front and making an effort to connect with any advance parties of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry on or about objective line."

BREAKING THE HINDENBURG LINE

We come now to the big attack of September 29th and 30th, in which the Hindenburg Line was broken. This action is officially known as the Battle of the Hindenburg Line. The reader should bear in mind that the Twenty-Seventh Division fought this battle in co-operation with the Ninetieth American Division, the two divisions comprising the Second American Corps, with the Third British Corps, Australian Corps, Ninth British Corps, with other British troops on the left, and the Tenth French Army on the right. The enemy troops opposing were the Second Guard Division, Two Hundred and Thirty-second Infantry Division, Fifty-fourth Infantry Division, One Hundred and Eighty-Fifth Infantry Division, One Hundred and Twenty-First Infantry Division and Seventy-Fifth Infantry Division. The character of the defenses on this portion of the Hindenburg Line is of great significance. Documents captured during the battle disclose the fact that the Germans considered this particular section of the famous Hindenburg system as absolutely impregnable. These documents show that pamphlets had been printed by order of the German High Command and distributed to officers and men, in which it was said that no matter what other part of the line might fall into the hands of Americans or the Allied Armies, that the part of the line adjacent to the St. Quentin Canal Tunnel could never be taken. The Germans regarded it as the French did the defenses around Verdun. In fact, it was known as the "German Verdun." The barbed wire entanglement alone was more than ordinarily formidable. One of the most important features of the defenses at this point was the use that had been made of the tunnel itself as an adjunct to the trenches of the Hindenburg line nearby.

The officers of the Twenty-Seventh Division had obtained a very accurate description of the tunnel from prisoners who had been captured by patrols. The following description of the tunnel is taken from the official report:

DESCRIPTION OF FORTIFICATIONS

"The Bellicourt Tunnel runs for $5\frac{3}{4}$ kilometers at a depth underground varying from 13 to 20 meters. It is 10 meters

wide at the top, by 18 meters wide at the water level and strongly built of masonry. A tow path runs all along the eastern side and another along at least part of the western side. There are reported to be air holes every 300 meters and also chambers out in the walls. Early in 1918 there were twenty-five barges in the tunnel north of the Bellicourt block which were used as billets. According to recent prisoners, these barges are now broken up or sunk. There are foot bridges across the water bed. Prisoners in 1917 stated that there were from four to five approach galleries about 30 meters apart with entrances 30 to 40 steps down on the west side of the road. The location of these lateral galleries was fixed by a captured German map. Some of these approaches are discernible on photographs taken by airplanes. This map also shows three galleries into the canal, cutting just south of Riqueval (See map). In addition, another prisoner reports another exit in the cellar of a villa with a shaft running into the Bellicourt road. These galleries are confirmed by maps and by a prisoner of an electrical power company, whose engine room was in one of the chambers out in the east wall of the tunnel at Bellicourt. According to prisoners' statements in 1917, there were 15 underground galleries leading from the Gouy-Bellicourt road into the tunnel, which enabled the Boche troops to enter or leave the tunnel unobserved. As far as can be gathered from a recent prisoner, he emerged from one of these lateral galleries close to the Gouy-Bellicourt road. There is little trace of such exits on photographs, as they are camouflaged with brushwood, according to the prisoner's statement. According to the prisoner, there are about 9 such galleries from the tunnel between Bellicourt and Bony.

"Apart from the air shafts along the tunnel, as shown on the maps, there is a series of dugouts out into the eastern bank of a long spoil heap which runs above the ground over line of the tunnel. It does not seem likely that these dugouts lead down into the tunnel, as the latter is 15 to 20 meters below. It is possible that there are also galleries leading west from the tunnel to exits in the dugouts shown along the Hindenburg support line."

The tunnel was blocked at each entrance. These blocks were described by a prisoner as being of thick, ferro-concrete, containing an upper chamber over the waterway with a platform. These blocks were provided with slits for two machine guns, with which it was intended to sweep the tunnel should the American or Allied forces gain an entrance. The Boche also had a machine gun nest on the southwest entry of the tunnel. There were also machine gun emplacements on the outside of the blocks, with which to sweep the open canal.

The big attack on the 29th contemplated the taking of the entire series of trenches of the Hindenburg system that lay between the position occupied by the Twenty-Seventh and the tunnel just described. The attack began at five fifty in the morning. The reader may picture a situation very similar to that of the preliminary attack of the two days previous. The same ordeal had to be gone through, and those who lived through it will never forget it. Dawn was just breaking and there was a heavy mist. The following description is from a soldier's letter:

A SOLDIER'S LETTER

"I could see our own infantry advancing in wave formation in front of me, and over the hill I could see different colored lights and rockets going up from Fritz's lines. It was still a little dark.

"Suddenly some Fritzies appeared on the skyline with their hands up. They were some that had possibly been surprised and scared by our barrage. They gave up immediately and were sent to the rear without guard; some of them being hit on the way. The advance went on steadily.

"Our company was in formation of squad columns by platoons. The men lined up in single file behind the corporals. They were advancing calmly and steadily, although men had already started to drop. I know I had no sensation of fear whatever, but had a rapidly rising hatred for Fritz and a desire to get at him, and I think we all felt the same way.

"We would walk about fifty or sixty yards and then drop into shell holes and rest for a minute or so as the machine gun



In Flanders Fields

*By Lieut.-Col. John McCrae
Died in the service January 28, 1918
and buried in Flanders Fields*

IN Flanders Fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

†
We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders Fields.

†
Take up our quarrel with the foe
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders Fields.

†
FROM "IN FLANDERS FIELDS AND OTHER POEMS"
BY JOHN MCCRAE
COURTESY OF G.P. PUTNAM'S SONS



In Flanders Fields



- An Answer -
By R. W. Lillard

REST ye in peace, ye Flanders dead!
The fight that ye so bravely led
We've taken up! And we will keep
True faith with you who lie asleep,
With each a cross to mark his bed,
And poppies blowing overhead.
Where once his life blood ran red!
So let your rest be sweet and deep
In Flanders Fields.



Fear not that ye have died for naught;
The torch ye threw to us we caught!
Ten million hands will hold it high,
And Freedom's light shall never die!
We've learned the lesson that ye taught
In Flanders Fields.



COURTESY OF THE NEW YORK EVENING POST



JOHN H. EGGERS, N. Y.

equipment makes a very heavy load for the men. We would get our bearings, and then on again over the crest of the hill; then started through the valley, the Germans holding the hills on both sides and having them covered with machine gun nests. The Fritzies had come up out of their dugouts now, as our barrage was far ahead, and were sending a perfect hail of shots at us from machine guns and snipers.

"As we advanced we could see the tanks ploughing along ahead, cutting the barbed wire and firing into the Germans. We crossed two lines of German trench, which had been hastily abandoned and were strewn with German equipment, and went on toward the valley.

"It was about this time that our artillery started sending over a smoke cloud, intended for our left flank to screen us from the Germans there, but the smoke was unfortunately blown down into the valley and bothered us a lot.

"We kept going ahead by compass, but finally had to stop and wait in a shell hole for the smoke to blow over. When it finally cleared, I was with a sergeant and about ten men from my platoon; we couldn't see our troops anywhere.

"We advanced a little further. We were on the slope on the right side of the valley and ran into machine gun fire from all around us, so we went into shell holes again until we could get our bearings.

"Finally I went out ahead with another man to try and locate our troops, but all we could see were Germans on three sides of us, about three hundred yards away in some places. They started sniping at us, so we started back to our men.

"There was a knocked-out tank near us and on the way back we met an officer from it and he asked us to come up and help get his men out of the trouble. They were in a shell hole near the tank and were under heavy fire from Fritz. So we moved up with our men to help them."

TANKS PUT OUT OF ACTION

On the big Hindenburg attack the infantry was preceded by 26 British tanks. These tanks were known as the "Mark 5 Star" tanks, which are the heaviest used in the British

Army. They were mounted with small cannon and 6 machine guns to each tank. As in the preliminary action the tanks were found to be practically useless, and almost immediately 9 of the tanks were put out of action, either by ground mines laid by the Boche or anti-tank artillery.

Our forces were under one other distinct disadvantage at the outset. It will be remembered that the Knoll, Guillemont Farm and Quennemont Farm had not been entirely occupied by our troops. In this action the barrage started on a line beyond these strong points, thereby leaving any of the enemy occupying this line free to go into action at once.

It had not been found that any of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry held at the time of this attack any of the position which they reached for a time in the attack on the 27th. The original plans had presumed that these points would be held prior to the main attack. In spite of this machine gun fire our men made a swift advance and the first line trenches of the Hindenburg system from Bony to Bellicourt fell into American hands. (See map.)

North of Bony, however, the situation was extremely trying. The enemy was able to make a flank movement in the neighborhood of Vendhuille, where the American trenches and the trenches of the Hindenburg system actually joined, and the enemy was able to enfilade our men and work great havoc.

PROGRESS OF THE ATTACK

The following statements from reports received at Division Headquarters show the progress of the attack:

At 6:05 A. M., a few minutes after the attack began, a message was received from the Fifty-Third Infantry Brigade saying that the situation seemed quite normal for an hour before the attack, although previous to that time the enemy had seemed nervous and displayed some extra activity.

At 6:21 A. M. a telegram read, "Tanks on hand and One Hundred and Seventh Infantry got off to good start."

At 8:04 A. M. Division Headquarters received a phone message saying that One Hundred and Seventh Infantry up till 7:30 A. M. had very little opposition, that the retaliation bar-

rage was light and well back of our troops, and that a wounded officer reported 31 prisoners. One of the prisoners told us the attack was a surprise.

A telephone message received from the One Hundred and Eighth Infantry at eight fifty-five quotes "One Hundred and Eighth Infantry doing well." The counter barrage went chiefly over the heads of center battalion, who suffered only few casualties. At eight ten the regiment was reported to have passed the Hindenburg Line on the way to the tunnel. Opposition encountered was not very strong and casualties not unduly severe.

Eight forty-five—A telephone message said that wounded man from Company I, One Hundred and Fifth Infantry, had been told that the trench he was in was the Hindenburg Line. That meant the One Hundred and Sixth was ahead of him and the One Hundred and Seventh and One Hundred and Eighth must have been well ahead of the Hindenburg Line. At 6:30 A. M. the Fifty-Fourth Infantry Brigade had been seen entering Bony through which the Hindenburg Line ran.

The strong outpost positions were in the locality where the heavy casualties were most numerous.

Nine A. M.—A message reported "Third Battalion of One Hundred and Eighth Infantry suffering heavy casualties at Guillemont Farm. Ran into machine guns but continued to advance."

Nine five—An officer of the One Hundred and Fifth Infantry telephoned that he had been wounded in the arm by a machine gun—that he had practically no trouble from Boche artillery but that machine gun fire was very heavy.

Ten fifteen—The following was received at Division Headquarters from the Fifty-Fourth Infantry Brigade. "A wounded officer of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry states that casualties, especially officers, were heavy."

One P. M.—A message was received from the Third Australian Division saying that the Americans were leaderless near Guillemont Farm and Willow Trench. More detailed reports show that the enemy maintained a machine gun fire throughout the day covering the whole territory of the ad-

vance. Part of the original jumping-off place was under fire until late in the afternoon.

The report of operations emphasizes the fact that the enemy fire was strongest on the extreme left and extreme right. The report says:

“MOPPING UP”

“The One Hundred and Eighth Regimental Sector Right Battalion met opposition from Quennemont Farm. Part of this battalion passed on and reached the Hindenburg Line. A detour to the south had to be made to get through the wire and trenches. One hundred and fourteen prisoners were captured and trenches mopped up toward Bony.”

Mopping up is the term the soldiers use to indicate driving out the enemy by bayonet and hand grenades. The report continues:

“Patrols sent to the front were killed by enemy sniper and machine gun fire. Enemy several times counter-attacked during the day by bombing from the direction of Bony, but were driven off. This force of 2 officers and 100 men, keeping in subjection their prisoners beat off all counter-attacks and maintained their position on the Hindenburg Line throughout the day and held the enemy until the advance of the Australian Corps reached them.”

The remainder of the Battalion was held up at Quennemont Farm and vicinity and by fire from Bony, the action being kept up until the farm was finally taken, and mopped up. The Australians came up to what was left of this battalion and together with a number of men of the One Hundred and Eighth, who were largely leaderless, made a small advance during the afternoon.

Part of the Third Battalion of the One Hundred and Eighth Infantry passed Guillemont Farm and was held up by fire from Bony. The remainder of the battalion met much resistance from Guillemont Farm and vicinity.

The Third Battalion of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry was subjected to heavy fire from the start and advanced steadily until it met with resistance from Lone Tree Trench and

Guillemont Farm. Part of this battalion passed through and formed a portion of the force later described as passing the Hindenburg Line, the remainder continuing to fight where they had been stopped by fire from Willow and Lone Tree Trenches.

BOCHE AIRPLANE BROUGHT DOWN

Near Guillemont Farm a German airplane was brought down by Lewis gun and rifle fire. At this point 6 of our officers were killed and 3 wounded, including the battalion commander and adjutant.

About 11:30 A. M. an officer went about 300 yards to the rear to get help from the trench mortars. He met an Australian tank captain who consented to use his tanks against the Guillemont Farm fortifications, but all the tanks were soon destroyed by mines or shell fire. When the tanks approached, the men were organized into small groups by the two surviving officers of the battalion and led the tanks. When the tanks failed, men were seen retiring to the trenches, but retirement was stopped here and the men prepared to hold the trench. In a few minutes they were reinforced by a company of the One Hundred and Fifth Infantry. In half an hour the combined troops went forward under machine gun fire to Willow Trench, where they were soon reinforced. The enemy repeated its attack with hand grenades several times from the left, but our men killed a number of Boches and the attacks were driven off. About 6:30 P. M. the combined troops filtered forward on the left, but those on the right could not do so. About nine thirty in the evening the men who went forward were ordered to retire to Willow Trench.

The First Battalion of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry met many strong enemy machine gun nests immediately after leaving the starting line. As long as the men could get fairly close to the positions and rush them they succeeded in advancing in spite of heavy casualties. On reaching the general line, however, near Willow Trench and Knoll Trench, they were stopped by heavy machine gun fire. The resistance encountered here was so strong that the major

part of the battalion were unable to advance, but certain squads reached the Hindenburg Line. Tanks were unsuccessful here, also, as in other places. Several of them attempted to assist the line forward beyond Willow Trench but were disabled, some of them by ground mines. However, the positions at Willow Trench were maintained throughout the day.

ALL COMPANY OFFICERS KILLED

The Second Battalion of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry in support went into action following the Third Battalion of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry, going forward and taking a position in Willow and Guillemont Crescent Trenches. One tank accompanied the battalion. The battalion was stopped by very heavy machine gun fire, both from the north and from the front, but certain groups managed to break through and reach the Hindenburg Line. Being unable to go forward on account of machine gun fire they worked their way back to Willow Trench. By this time all officers of this battalion had become casualties. The position was held there during the day with the front line in shell holes, about 200 yards west of Lone Tree and Crescent Trenches, with an advance line in Willow Trench and South Guillemont Trench. The battalion losses were 45 killed, 298 wounded, and 35 missing.

A composite battalion made up of surviving units of the One Hundred and Sixth Infantry, composed of 14 officers and 450 men, advanced in the rear of the Third Battalion of the One Hundred and Seventh Infantry. As the attacking line of the One Hundred and Seventh was held up in the vicinity of Willow Trench, this composite battalion caught up with them and entered into the fight. Out of the 14 officers in this battalion, 9, including the commander, were killed or wounded.

The One Hundred and Fifth Infantry was assembled in the vicinity of Yak Post and Lempire Post. The leading battalion, followed by the other, started off at zero hour under artillery formation, but was delayed fifteen minutes in an attempt to secure a contact with the troops in front. The leading

Battalion found a dense smoke screen and attempted to stop in order not to close up too much on the attacking troops ahead. The Battalions were subjected to exceptionally heavy machine gun fire from the direction of the Knoll and a number of casualties were caused by platoons advancing in the smoke and running into this machine gun fire.

On account of this smoke it was impossible to hold all the platoons, some of which continued to advance, the remainder taking shelter in shell-holes. After reconnaissance, the line of trench running north from Island Travis was located and the Battalion was led to this point. Part of the Second Battalion, with companies of the other Battalions, advanced to Willow Trench. When the smoke screen lifted this line was reorganized as provisional companies and consolidated.

BOCHE ADVANCES FROM VENDHUILLE

Machine gun fire was very active from the direction of Vendhuille, which marked the upper boundary of the Twenty-Seventh's advance, as has been mentioned in previous paragraphs. The trenches occupied by our troops actually came so close to the Hindenburg trench system that only a mass of barbed wire separated them. Near Vendhuille the enemy was observed to be advancing over the crest of a hill. Our own machine guns of the One Hundred and Fifth Infantry were employed in sweeping the crest of this hill. The enemy was seen to be filtering over the hill and working down into Lone Tree Trench. By the use of hand grenades and Lewis guns, the Boches were prevented from further advance.

The First and Third Battalions of the One Hundred and Fifth Infantry followed the Second Battalion, but in the smoke advanced to the left in the direction of the Knoll. The left line extended north of the divisional boundary, meeting some British troops in their own sector, who on account of the smoke had also extended their line into our sector. Parts of the leading troops advanced to the east and the north of the Knoll, with severe casualties from the never ceasing fire of the German machine guns. What was left of these leading units filtrated back to Knoll Support and

Knoll Trench, where the support companies were located. Small groups of all the Battalions in this left regimental sector advanced in the smoke between the machine gun nests of the enemy, and passed through the Hindenburg Line, reaching the line in the canal, including part of Bony.

The experiences of these groups were tragic and terrible. They were unable to maintain the position and were without support, and consequently, most of them were killed or wounded. Their experience was very much the same as that of others who had made a similar dash passing the Hindenburg Line.

“OOZING UP”

When the attack was planned, it was believed that the Boche could be prevented from leaving the tunnel. Instructions given to our men prior to the battle contained the following: “Measures will necessarily have to be taken in order to prevent the enemy from emerging from the tunnel in rear of our men, and cutting them off.” It was not through any fault of those who planned the attack or those who executed it that this could not be prevented. The oozing up out of the tunnel of enemy troops coming up into the open, like ants out of an ant hill, was one of the disagreeable surprises that met our men. The Boches who came from the tunnel were able to mount their machine guns and do deadly damage to our men. These men were revenged, however, as later, other units completely mopped up the tunnel, and almost all of these Boche machine gunners were killed.

At eleven o’clock A.M. the line was held approximately as follows: On the right the Second Battalion One Hundred and Eighth Infantry were mopping up Quennemont Farm. The Third Battalion One Hundred and Eighth Infantry had parts of two companies in the Hindenburg Line south of Bony. The left of this battalion was held up in the vicinity of Guillemont Farm. The Second Battalion One Hundred and Eighth Infantry was occupying a position in their support. The Third Battalion One Hundred and Seventh Infantry with parts of the combined Battalion of the One Hundred and

Sixth Infantry held a position on the western edge of Guillemont Farm in Willow Trench. The second Battalion was in Willow Trench and vicinity. The First Battalion One Hundred and Seventh Infantry was intermingled with the One Hundred and Fifth Infantry in Willow Trench and Knoll Trench. The Second Battalion One Hundred and Seventh Infantry was somewhat to the left of the Third Battalion One Hundred and Seventh Infantry in Willow Trench. The One Hundred and Fifth Infantry was holding the line on Knoll Trench and the trenches just east of the crest of the Knoll. All these organizations had been much depleted on account of heavy casualties. The above positions were held until late in the afternoon.

A counter-attack by the enemy forces from Vendhuille and up Macquincourt valley was threatened, as numerous enemy troops were seen advancing, but the attack did not develop in great strength owing to the destructive effect of our field artillery and machine gun fire. The counter-attacks were local but determined. About 2 P. M. it became apparent that there was a shortage of officers on the front line and such officers as were available were sent to organize and command the detachments which had been driven back in the left regimental sector. About 4 P. M. it was decided by the Division Commander to make arrangements for the night.

LINE HELD NIGHT OF SEPTEMBER 29

On the evening of the twenty-ninth the line ran approximately north to south, as follows: Knoll Trench, with outposts in Knoll Switch, Willow Trench, on the west edge of Guillemont Farm, South Guillemont Trench, Claymore Trench, and south along the Hindenburg Line.

The final phase of the taking of the Hindenburg Line can be described in a few words. The fighting continued long after night fall on the twenty-ninth of September, and casualties were reported far into the night.

Under an arrangement with the Third Australian Division, those portions of the Twenty-Seventh Division which were on the front line moved forward and continued to attack

throughout Sept. 30, and with hand grenades and bayonets cleaned up the third line of trenches of the Hindenburg system opposite our sector, captured the Hindenburg Line on the left regimental sector, taking Bony, which, however, was not entirely mopped up until the following day. The tunnel was taken and such Germans as still remained in it were bayoneted or bombed or taken prisoners. Those who were captured were found to be broken in spirit and morale. Airplane observers reported the areas back of the tunnel to be thick with retreating Germans. German prisoners in innumerable instances when examined at Headquarters told of their dismay at having lost this stronghold.

OTHER BATTLES

In spite of the enormous losses sustained by the Twenty-Seventh Division in the taking of the Hindenburg Line, less than three weeks later it participated in two very important battles, that of La Selle River and the Battle of Jonc-de-Mer Ridge, both of which cost many lives. The Battle of La Selle River took place on October seventeenth. The town of St. Souplet was captured and several fortified farms were also taken.

In the Battle of La Selle River, the enemy had made a determined stand, using the stream as a defense. The Third British Corps, the Ninth British Corps, and the Tenth French Army participated in the engagement, as they had done in the Battle of the Hindenburg Line. It should not be forgotten that in all these battles the Thirtieth American Division was at the south of the Twenty-Seventh, the two divisions comprising the Second American Corps. The same troops participated in the Battle of Jonc-de-Mer Ridge.

Commenting on these two important battles following so closely on the Battle of the Hindenburg Line, Major-Gen. O'Ryan, in a bulletin issued at Headquarters on October thirty-first, said:

"The Division Commander cannot withhold this expression of his admiration and respect for the valor and discipline, as well as the endurance and spirit manifested by officers and

men throughout this long period of fighting. These sentiments are stimulated by the events of the past week. When reduced in numbers, the Division attacked the enemy, took the town of St. Souplet, forced the crossing of the La Selle River, and, against strong opposition, successfully assaulted the heights on the other side. Since that date, the Division has attacked daily, taking by force the town of Arbre Guernon and a number of strongly fortified farms and forcing a withdrawal of the enemy to the Canal de la Sambre."

On October nineteenth and twentieth, the day following the Battle of Jonc-de-Mer Ridge, the Division took part in an engagement on St. Maurice River in the vicinity of Catillon, France, at a time when the Infantry strength of the Division had been reduced to approximately 850 rifles. Against heavy attacks by enemy machine gun nests, together with Infantry and Artillery resistance, an advance was made to the line of the St. Maurice stream, and the enemy driven back to the Canal de la Sambre.

On October twenty-first, the Division was relieved by the British and moved to the Corbie area for rest.

Previous to the taking of the Hindenburg Line the Twenty-Seventh Division had been in several important minor engagements.

The First Units of the Division disembarked at Brest and St. Nazaire from May twenty-third to May thirty-first.

On June fifth the Division began training with the British in Northern France under the Second, Third, and Fourth British Armies.

ENGAGEMENTS IN BELGIUM

On July ninth it made a very significant move when it took over from the Seventy-first French Division, the responsibility for the defense of the East Poperinghe Line, the second line of the defense of the Dickebusch and Scherpenberg sectors in Belgium, on a front of approximately 12,000 yards. This was at the time when the Germans were planning an attack in a drive through to the sea. It was expected at this time that the armies of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria would make

an attempt at such a drive. The drive, however, was never made, in view of the counter attack made by General Foch on the Soissons-Rheims sector on the eighteenth of July.

However, the Twenty-seventh Division participated in minor actions in the Diekebusch sector on August twenty-third and thirtieth, repelling raids, making raids and patrols, facing enemy machine gun fire. On August thirty-first the Division fought in the engagement of Vierstraat Ridge. The engagement of Vierstraat Ridge, was an advance to occupy the Ridge and Mt. Kemmel from which it was believed the enemy had retired.

The enemy was found to be withdrawing his main force to Wytschaete Ridge but leaving machine gun nests, and kept the whole terrain covered with artillery fire. Our troops in their advance met strong resistance, including counter-attacks by German Infantry as far as the East slope of Vierstraat Ridge.

The Twenty-seventh Divisional Artillery which did not have any part in the foregoing, played, however, a very important part in the Meuse-Argonne offensive in support of the Thirty-third Division and Seventy-ninth Division in various operations from October fourteenth up to the signing of the armistice on November eleventh.

TRIBUTE BY COMMANDER

No better tribute can be paid by a commander than that found in a statement made by Major-General John F. O'Ryan upon his arrival in New York on Friday, March sixth, in which he said:

"I am happy to command such officers and men as compose this division, and I have no objection to speaking of them. In fact, I welcome the opportunity of saying a word or two of their discipline, valor and zeal. When I speak of them, I include our dead, and the wounded who have come on ahead of us.

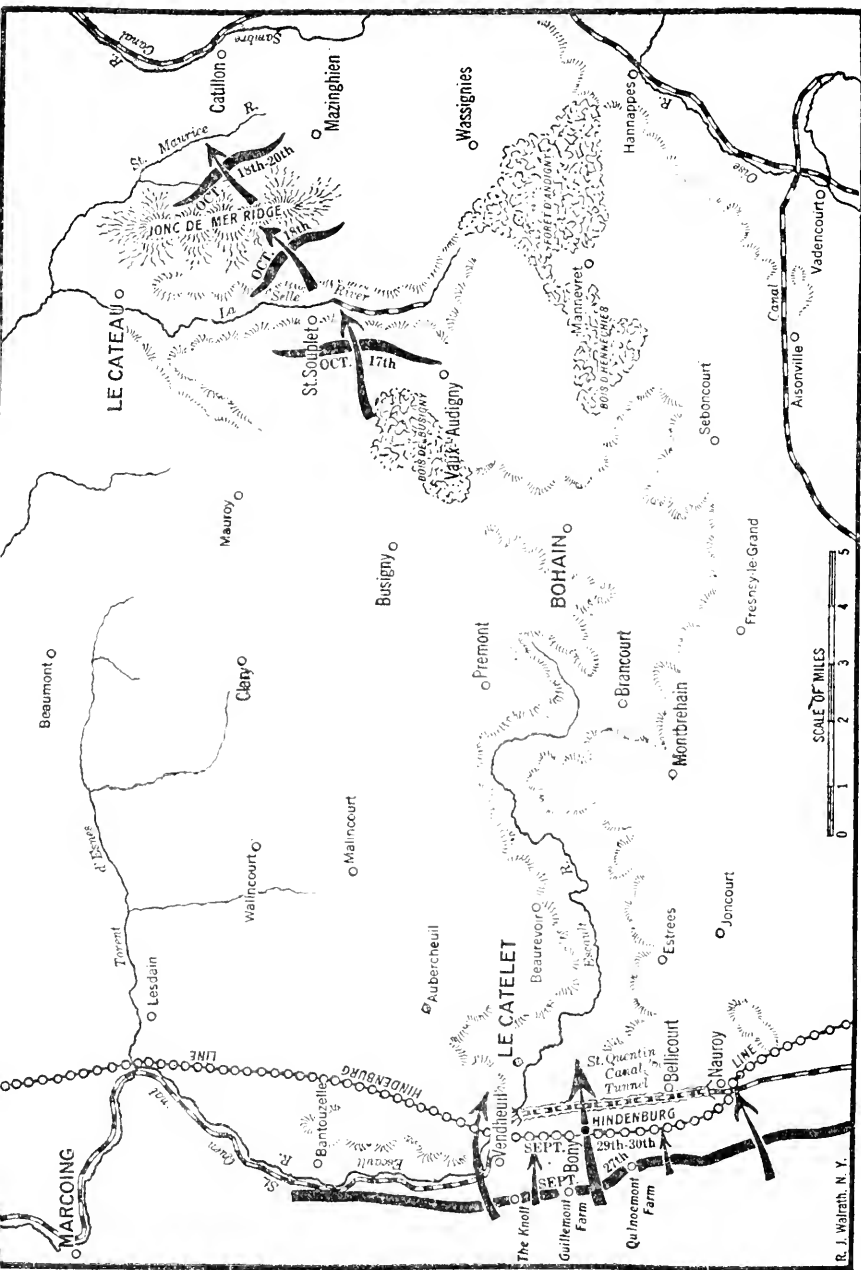
"In battle our men performed acts of valor so numerous, that within the division they came to be regarded almost as commonplace. The tributes, however, of our British and

Australian comrades who witnessed their work in action, and the numerous medals and citations awarded for acts of extraordinary heroism, furnish a better appraisal of their worth.

"The story of the service of the division is too long a story to do more than to refer to at this time, but I am sure the families of our soldiers and the many thousands of men in New York State who have served in the years gone by in the old regiments of the division, will be interested to know that the conduct of our men was at all times characterized by a remarkable spirit—a spirit difficult to define, but which reached in battle a veritable state of exaltation.

"It was a spirit which breathed confidence, determination and willingness to make any sacrifice to win."





R. J. Walrath, N. Y.

BY PERMISSION OF NEW YORK TIMES

Outpost Positions of Hindenburg Line at the Knoll and Guillemont Farm and Quinmont Farm were taken by the 27th Division on Sept. 27, 1918. The Battle of the Hindenburg Line, in which the St. Quentin Tunnel was captured, took place Sept. 29. Three later battles were at St. Souplet, Oct. 17, Jonc de Mer Ridge, Oct. 18, and St. Maurice River, Oct. 19-20.



Field ...
Neuro ...
Treatment ...

A WORLD LEADER IN PAPER PRESERVATION

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 007 691 604 4